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COINS & MEDALS

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Aids to the Study and Verification of
HOLY WRIT :

READ BEFORE THE NUMISMATIC SOCIETY
OF MONTREAL,

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IN the first paper read before this Society, I stated that Coins had frequently been of the greatest service in illustrating doubtful points of history, and even bringing to light circumstances and events unknown to us before. My present subject is, "Coins and Medals as aids to the study and verification of Holy Writ."

It has been said, if it were with the Sciences as with Nobility, which draws its principal glory from its antiquity, the science of Medals would be without contradiction, the most considerable and most esteemed, because the use of money for the service of man is almost as ancient as the world itself. A writer on the subject has said, that coined money was the invention of Tubal-Cain. Our earliest record of primitive civilization, the Holy Bible, informs us that gold and silver were

used in lieu of direct barter as early as the time of Shem ; and we there learn that Abraham returned from Egypt very rich in cattle, silver and gold. This was, according to the commonly received computation, 1918 years B.C. Much, no doubt, was actual money, for it is shewn by the painted sculptures of Egypt, that silver and gold were known as circulating media, and were in common use by the Egyptians as such, but this kind of money passed by weight and not by tale. The Hebrew word sometimes translated pieces of silver, may as properly be translated lambs. The Egyptians weighed out gold and silver by a weight the shape of which was that of a lamb. It is natural to suppose that the weights were originally determined by the value of a sheep or lamb. "A lamb and a just weight." The evidence that the price of cattle was the earliest method of fixing the value of money, and that gold and silver were valued according to the number of cattle a given quantity would buy, is proved by our own language, since the word *pecuniary*, is derived from *pecunia*, the Latin for money, and this was derived from *pecus* a flock. Abraham is stated to have given to Abimalech, one thousand pieces of silver, and in the purchase of the Cave of Macphelah, Abraham weighed to Ephron, four hundred She-

kels of silver, current with the merchant. Thus we find the Shekel so early established as a national Jewish weight, though it was as yet unknown as a coin. It was the received maxim of the Jews, that wherever the money of any person was owned as the current coin of the kingdom, there the inhabitants owned that person as their Lord and Governor; and David, though anointed by Samuel, is declared not to be their king whilst Saul lived, because "*Numisma Saulis adhuc obtinet*," the coin which had the image of Saul upon it was still the current coin. In the letter of Antiochus the King to Simon the High Priest, in the 6th verse, 15th chapter of the 1st Book of Maccabees, this passage occurs, "and I give thee leave to coin money of thine own stamp, in thine own country." The earliest coin of Simon Maccabæus, took the name of the old national weight, (Shekel); it was issued about the year 144 B C. On the obverse is the sacred cup of manna, which Moses was directed to preserve in commemoration of the food furnished the Israelites in the wilderness. On the reverse is the rod of Aaron, with buds thereon, commemorative of that miracle. The usual inscription being, "Shekel of Israel," on the obverse, and "Jerusalem the Holy," on the reverse. The legends were in the ancient form of Hebrew characters.

A few years ago a silver shekel was considered rare; but within the past seven years a large number of them have been found in Jerusalem, near the Pool of Siloam, evidently washed down by the rain from some point on the Hill of Moriah or the opposite slope of Zion. The Greek and Roman currency took the place of this coinage, and although coins of Herod and of Barkochebas are extant, it seems improbable that these were issued to any great extent. There are also copper coins of Agrippa, but they are rare.

The coins of the celebrated City of Athens have the head of Athenæ, (Minerva), the tutelary deity of the City on the obverse; the reverse has the Owl, the principal attribute of Minerva, for type, with a sprig of olive, sacred to the same divinity, in the corner, and the letters AΘΕ (Athe). This symbol, the Owl, gave rise to the well known anecdote of the Athenian miser, the roof of whose house was said to be infested by vast numbers of Owls, in allusion to money of the well known Athenian type being concealed therein.

The first Roman coin that I shall mention, in connection with my present subject, will be a denarius of Julius Cæsar, commemorating the conquest of Egypt. Obverse, head of Cæsar; inscription, CÆSAR. COS. VI. Reverse, crogo-

dile, legend, ÆGYPTO CAPTA. The next, that of the Colony of Nismes, by some considered rare. The heads of Augustus and Agrippa, with the letters IMP. DIVI. F. are on the obverse; the Crocodile and Palm-tree, with COL. NEM, on the reverse. It was struck by the colony upon the conquest of Egypt, after the victory of Actium. The Palm tree is Phœnecia, the Crocodile, Egypt, chained to a palm, the emblem of victory. Of the Denarii of Augustus, there is a great variety, and a collection of above two hundred and fifty may be formed. One of these I mention, it bears the emblem of a comet. This coin was probably struck in the early part of his reign, and unwittingly forshadowed that extraordinary star which guided certain Eastern Philosophers, Magi, or Wise Men, commonly called the three kings, to the abode of the holy child Jesus, the Prince of Peace, when they went and paid him the adoration due to his dignity as King of the Jews. Various conjectures have been formed by the learned concerning this star, which is said to have appeared in the East. Some think it was a comet, Of the coins of Tiberius, the denarius commonly known as the tribute money, in Scripture called a penny, is exceedingly interesting. The obverse bears the portrait and name of the Emperor, but

Numismatists differ as to the reverse. Some say it has Tiberius seated, with PONTIF. MAX. for legend; while others affirm the reverse to be a ring without a legend, signifying that all the world was subject to Cæsar, and consequently obliged to pay tribute. As our blessed Saviour miraculously procured money from a fish to pay tribute for himself and St. Peter, the miracle was of such a kind as could not fail to demonstrate that he was the Son of the Great Monarch worshipped in the Temple, and who rules the universe. In the very manner, therefore, of paying tribute, he shewed his power, and at the same time gave the useful lesson, that it is better to recede a little from one's just rights than to offend the brethren, or disturb the state. And upon another occasion, when they attempted to entrap him by asking, "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?" He saw through their secret intentions, and desired to see a piece of the tribute money. The Roman coin was produced, upon which he taught them, that as the money bore the image and superscription of Cæsar, it was his, and by making use of it they acknowledged his authority, nevertheless they should pay it, "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's."

Having in my first paper alluded to the Widow's

Mite, which she cast into the Treasury of the Temple, and the remarks of the Saviour thereon, I would merely state that, as he was going out of the Temple the Disciples remembered that he had said, that the Temple should not again be favored with his presence 'till they should say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." They, therefore, desired him to observe the beauty of the building, whereupon he repeated the prophecy of its destruction, which he had before mentioned, when he prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem. The medal struck in commemoration of the subjection of Judeæ, and which in reality commemorates the fulfilment of this prophecy, has on the obverse the laureated head of the Emperor, with the inscription IMP. T. CAES. VESP. AVG. P. M. T R. P. P. P. COS. VIII. Which reads Imperator Titus Cæsar Vespasian Augustus, Pontifex Maximus, Tribunitia Potestate, Pater Patria Consul VIII, and translated runs, Titus Cæsar Vespasian Augustus High Pontiff, the tribunitary power, father of his country, consul for the eighth time. The reverse has JVD. CAP. Judeæ Capta. Judea taken. The palm-tree symbolising the subdued country, rises in the centre; on one side stands the figure of a captive, and on the other side of the tree sits a female fig-

ure in the act of weeping. This and the Judæa Devicta Medal, are remarkable testimonies to the truth of Scripture. We seek in vain for Christian emblems on the coinage of the first Christian Emperor. On the coinage of his son, Constantius, Christian emblems first begin to appear. The principal one being the Labarum, or sacred banner, bearing the monogram of Christ, which is held in the right hand of the Emperor. The inscriptions do not refer to the Christian symbol. The legend respecting the labarum bearing the monogram of Christ, is that it was presented to Constantine the Great, on the eve of his great battle with Maxentius, and that by its influence he gained the victory which gave him the dominion over the Roman world. There are a variety of coins whose inscriptions contain an acknowledgment of the Supreme Authority of the High and Mighty Ruler of the Universe. I mention as a specimen, the one chosen for the seal of this Society, VICTORIA. DEI. GRATIA. REGINA, CANADA.

It is thus that coins and medals are useful as aids to the study and verification of Holy Writ. I will now give a synopsis of the advantages derivable from the study of Numismatics. The study of medals is indispensable to Archæology,

and to a thorough acquaintance with the fine arts. They indicate the names of Provinces and Cities, determine their position, and present pictures of many celebrated places. They fix the period of events, determine, sometimes, their character, and enable us to trace the series of kings. They enable us to learn the different metallurgical processes, the different alloys, the mode of gilding and plating practised by the ancients, the metals which they used, their weights and measures, their different modes of reckoning, the names and titles of the various magistrates and princes, and also their portraits, the different divinities with their attributes and titles, the utensils and the ceremonies of their worship, the costume of the priests,—in fine, everything which relates to usages, civil, military and religious.

In preparing the foregoing remarks, I have taken notes from various works, and the following lines with which I conclude this paper are quoted nearly verbatim from the writings of a celebrated Poet :

“ Perhaps, by its own ruins sav’d from flame,
Some buried marble half preserves a name ;
That name the learn’d with fierce disputes pursue
And give to Titus old Vespasian’s due.
Ambition sigh’d ; she found it vain to trust
The faithless column and the crumbling bust ;
Huge moles, whose shadows stretch’d from shore
to shore,

Their ruins perish'd, and their place no more !
 Convinc'd, she now contracts her vast design,
 And all her triumphs shrink into a coin.
 A narrow orb each crowded conquest keeps,
 Beneath her palm here sad Judea weeps ;
 Now scantier limits the proud arch confine,
 And scarce are seen the prostrate Nile or Rhine ;
 A small Euphrates through the piece is roll'd,
 And little eagles wave their wings in gold.
 The medal, faithful to its charge of fame,
 Through climes and ages bears each form and
 name,

In one short view, subjected to our eyes,
 Gods, emperors, heroes, sages, beauties rise.
 With sharpen'd sight, pale antiquaries pore,
 Th' inscription value, but the rust adore.
 This the blue varnish, that the green endears,
 The sacred rust of twice ten hundred years !
 To gain Pescenius one employs his schemes,
 One grasps a Cecrops in ecstatic dreams.
 Poor Vadius, long with learned spleen devour'd,
 Can taste no pleasure save his shield was scour'd,
 And Curio, restless by the fair one's side,
 Sighs for an Otho, and neglects his bride.
 Their's is the vanity, the learning thine, ;
 Touched by thy hand, again Rome's glories shine :
 Her gods and god-like heroes rise to view,
 And all her faded garlands bloom anew.
 Nor blush, these studies thy regard engage,
 These pleas'd the fathers of poetic rage ;
 The verse and sculpture bore an equal part,
 And art reflected images to art.

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